

# HOW TO THRIVE DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

The winter holidays are upon us, and whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Bodhi Day, Yule, Winter Solstice, or New Year's, they can bring both stress and joy. Many of us have a love-hate relationship with the holiday season.

No matter where you are with your alcohol and substance use, this guide can help you make the most of your holidays and avoid any unwanted surprises. First and foremost, it's important to remember that you are not alone. Many people struggle with alcohol and substance use during the holidays. Whether you're in recovery, trying to cut back, or simply wanting to be mindful of your consumption, it's okay to set boundaries and prioritize your well-being.

One way to do this is to plan ahead. If you know you are going to a party or event where alcohol will be present, consider bringing a non-alcoholic beverage or a friend who supports your choices. If you are going to drink, be sure to have a designated driver. If you're hosting a gathering, consider offering various drink options, including non-alcoholic ones.

It's also essential to stay connected with your support system, which includes attending support group meetings, talking to a therapist or sponsor, or simply reaching out to friends and family who understand and respect your boundaries.

Finally, remember to be gentle with yourself. The holidays can be stressful, and it's okay to take a step back to prioritize your well-being. Whether taking a break from social events or practicing self-care, doing what feels right is essential.

With these tips in mind, you can make the most of your holiday season and navigate any challenges that come your way.



Mid-America (HHS Region 7)

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Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network  
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# TIPS FOR EVERYONE

1. **Budget** - Many people overspend during the holidays. Remember not to confuse material things for love, especially during the holidays. Set a budget and stick to it; it will help you avoid overspending and financial stress.
2. **Let Go of Perfectionism** - A welcoming home doesn't require perfection, just a warm and inviting atmosphere. A meal made with love is more important than striving for the perfect dish. And when it comes to setting the table, what matters most is creating an environment where everyone feels welcomed and included, just as they are.
3. **Hydrate** - When life is busy, it's easy to forget to drink enough water. Carry a water bottle when running errands to stay hydrated and feel your best.
4. **Stay Rested** - The holidays can easily interfere with your sleep schedule. Sleeping at night helps decrease stress, boost the immune system, regulate hormones, and prevent fatigue and brain fog. If you know you have an early morning ahead of you, turn the TV and cell phone off and go to bed earlier. Your body will thank you in the morning.
5. **Care for Yourself** - It is easy to forget about your own needs during the busyness of the season. Whether you like going for a walk, a relaxing bath, or enjoying a cup of your favorite coffee- make sure to carve out some time for yourself and check in with what you need.

## Hosting a party



Some guests may want to stay sober or not use substances. When you host a party, there are a number of things you can do to make guests feel comfortable and enjoy themselves without pressure to drink or use. Here are some helpful things you can do for the guests who choose not to partake for any reason:

- Don't call attention to guests who decline to drink or use.
- Have a variety of alcohol-free drinks, including water, sparkling water, juice and soda.
- Avoid drinking games and ask guests who are smoking tobacco and cannabis to step outside.
- Keep the alcohol in separate coolers or on other tables from the non-alcoholic drinks.
- Provide plenty of food options, including vegetarian and vegan choices. Food slows the absorption of alcohol and offers alternatives to drinking.



## Tips for People in Recovery

**Set boundaries** - Be prepared for situations where your boundaries may be tested. Rehearse your response to declining alcoholic beverages or substances and questions about your recovery. Being prepared will help you feel more confident and in control during social events.

**Be intentional about the events you attend** - Be thoughtful about the holiday invitations you accept or decline. It is okay to decline invitations or customs that are unhealthy. Celebrate with people who support your recovery.

**Create a plan** - Develop a recovery plan to implement at holiday events/parties. Bring a supportive person to holiday gatherings or bring your own beverages or food. Always have an exit plan to leave should you become uncomfortable.

**Practice self-care** - Focus on not becoming too hungry, angry, lonely, or tired, HALT. Be sure to get enough rest and eat properly. It will help with stress during the holidays. Being intentional will help to make self-care your priority.

**Support system** - If you are in a support group, attend more meetings during the holiday season. There are many activities in the recovery community during the holidays, and participating in them helps build supportive friendships.

**Marathon meetings** - If you go to 12-step meetings, research what groups in the area are doing Marathon meetings or round-the-clock meetings. They often include food and fellowship.

**Try something new!** Many people new in recovery are used to spending the holidays engaging in addictive behaviors. Try new things like cooking meals or watching holiday movies and sporting events with friends. If your family of origin is not healthy for your recovery, consider spending time with close friends whom you feel are supportive.

# Harm Reduction Tips



During the holiday season, there are a number of opportunities to indulge in festive activities. However, excessive drinking and drug use can have negative effects and dampen the holiday spirit. For many, the holidays are associated with increased stress and can lead to higher levels of substance use.

**Here are some tips to help you make the most of your holidays.**

## **Make a plan**

Alcohol and other substances lower inhibitions and impair physical and mental abilities. While clear-minded, set your limits before going to the party. It will help you from overindulging later. If it is difficult to decline a drink, try a mocktail or a soft drink. Here are more helpful tips:

- Keep track of how much you drink.
- Have a plan for politely declining alcohol.
- Know and avoid the triggers that increase your desire to drink or use substances when you don't want to or when you have had enough.
- A drink is considered 2 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor.
- The limits on drinks are generally considered one drink or less for women and two drinks or less for men. Please note that this does not mean you are okay to drive after consuming this much alcohol.

## **Purpose**

Think about why there will be drinking and or substances at an event. Knowing the purpose of the drinking and or drug use at an event is helpful. If you have a feeling the reason for the event is only about alcohol or substance use, you may want to reconsider your plans. Most people drink or partake of substances as a way to relax, unwind, relieve social anxiety, have fun, or enjoy the taste. Understanding your motives behind drinking or substance use may help you choose other ways to meet those desires without partaking or without going over the limits you've set for yourself before the party starts.

# Resources



## LGBTQ+ SPECIFIC RESOURCES:

- [Queer Holiday Survival Guide](#)
- [An LGBTQ Guide for Surviving the Holidays](#)
- [Holiday Self-Care Tips for LGBTQ Youth](#)
- [5 Holiday Tips for LGBTQ+ People in Recovery](#)
- [How to Have a Queer, Safe, and Sober Holiday](#)

## RECOVERY SPECIFIC RESOURCES:

- [The Ultimate Holiday Survival Guide](#)
- [Preparing for Holiday Challenges to Addiction Recovery](#)
- [Tips for Staying Sober During the Holidays](#)
- [How to Cope with the Holidays... and Beyond!](#)

## HARM REDUCTION RESOURCES:

- [Never Use Alone](#)
- [Alcohol Harm Reduction for the Holidays](#)
- [Harm Reduction Holiday Tips](#)
- [First Nations Tips for Safer Celebrating over the Holidays](#)

## FAMILY SPECIFIC RESOURCES:

- [How to Support a Family Member in Recovery During the Holidays](#)
- [How to Support a Loved One Who Uses Drugs During the Holidays](#)
- [Al-Anon](#)
- [How to Cope for the Holidays](#)

# References

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How to have a Queer, Safe and Sober Holiday Season-Your Way The Temper  
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Preparing for holiday challenges to addiction recovery <https://smartrecovery.org/blog/holidays-challenges-to-addiction-recovery>



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